

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PN
SUBJECT: "HIGH-LEVEL COMMISSION" NAMED

REF: PANAMA 4897

1. GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED "CRITICA" TODAY ANNOUNCED THAT TORRIJOS HAS NAMED THE "HIGH-LEVEL COMMISSION" (REPORTED REFTEL) WHICH IS TO STUDY AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS ON POLITICAL REFORM, SPECIFICALLY, THE LEGALIZATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES. THOSE APPOINTED TO THE COMMISSION ARE DR. ROMULO ESCOBAR BETHANCOURT, ADVISER TO THE CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT; DR. ARISTIDES ROYO, EDUCATION MINISTER; AND NICOLAS GONZALEZ-REVILLA, FOREIGN MINISTER. "INTERESTED POLITICAL SECTORS" WILL BE INVITED TO NAME REPRESENTATIVES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE COMMISSION.

2. THE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE BEEN CLAMORING FOR LEGALIZATION, HAVE NOT JUMPED AT THE CHANCE TO NEGOTIATE IT OUT WITH THE GOVERNMENT. FOR EXAMPLE, THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES -- THE PANAMENISTA
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AND THE LIBERAL -- DECLINED TO PARTICIPATE LAST WEEK IN A TELEVISIED POLITICAL DISCUSSION WITH ROMULO ESCOBAR. ON GENERAL PRINCIPLES, THE PARTIES ARE RELUCTANT TO DEAL WITH GOVERNMENT FIGURES THEY CONSIDER "MARXISTS," SUCH AS ESCOBAR AND ROYO. THE INCLUSION OF GONZALEZ-REVILLA, WHO IS NOT CONSIDERED A POLITICAL HEAVYWEIGHT, MAY OR MAY NOT HELP TO

NEUTRALIZE THAT CONCERN.

3. ALTHOUGH SOME OF THE PARTIES TEND TO VIEW THE HIGH-LEVEL COMMISSION AS A TACTIC TO DELAY MEANINGFUL POLITICAL REFORM, TO REFUSE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE COMMISSION WOULD PROBABLY MEAN NO PROGRESS AT ALL TOWARDS THEIR BROAD GOAL OF DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO CARRY THROUGH THE ELECTIONS NOW IN PROGRESS FOR COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES AND THAT TORRIJOS INTENDS TO STAY IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT (EITHER AS PRESIDENT, IN A RENEWED TERM AS CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT, OR IN SOME OTHER INCARNATION) FOR AT LEAST THE NEXT SIX YEARS. THUS, THE PARTIES' HOPES FOR A THOROUGHGOING POLITICAL REFORM THROUGH, PERHAPS, A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE FULFILLED.
JORDEN

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